[Theme music ‘Some Spooky Sh*t Is Going On Here’ by Theo Goodwin]

INTRO

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The Underwood Collection, Episode Eight: Actea

(*Tape recorder clicks on. Tape static is heard continually throughout*)

ULYSSES
Statement of Lucy Murphy, regarding an incident that took place while walking near Hound Tor, Dartmoor. Original statement given—

[Knocking.]

Come in.

CASSIAN
Hey, have you seen Mars?

ULYSSES
Mars? No, why?

CASSIAN
They’re leaving today — skydiving holiday, I think.

ULYSSES
Oh. Again?

CASSIAN

I mean, their last vacation was almost a year ago, so… yeah?

ULYSSES
Oh, no— I meant about the skydiving. Didn't realise that was something one *did* multiple times.

CASSIAN
(*Obviously joking.)*
Ah, see, that's where you're wrong. Part of a rebellion against the geologist parents, I think.

ULYSSES
Oh, I imagine. Sounds effective.

CASSIAN
Yeah, well. I was off to say goodbye, if you wanted to come?

ULYSSES
Ah— When are they leaving? I've got— Y'know. Just trying to get this recording done.

CASSIAN
Bout an hour?

ULYSSES
Oh, good. Harass me when they're on their way out?

CASSIAN
Sure thing.

ULYSSES
Thanks, Cass.

CASSIAN
Yeah, course.

ULYSSES
Close the door on your way out? Please?

CASSIAN
(With amusement.)
Yes, boss.

ULYSSES
(Lighthearted groaning.)
Oh, don't do that—

CASSIAN
Not enjoying being my superior?

ULYSSES
You can *have* my job. You're just as qualified—

CASSIAN
And would be kinder to Morgan's
nerves-slash-sanity-slash-archival-system.

ULYSSES
...Ouch.

CASSIAN
Believe me, I don't want it. —The job, I mean, not Morgan's sanity.

ULYSSES
Not that interested in sorting out the difference between a malevolent fear god and things that go bump in the night? It's kind of fun.

CASSIAN
...Have a nice statement, Ulysses.

ULYSSES
I will. And thanks again.

CASSIAN
See you.

[Door shuts.]

ULYSSES
Alright. Where were we?

Statement of Lucy Murphy, regarding an incident that took place while walking near Hound Tor, Dartmoor. Original statement given 23 October, 2016. Statement begins.

I've always loved walking. I didn't bother learning to drive until I absolutely had to for work, preferring to just… travel everywhere on foot. Hell of a lot cheaper that way. People used to laugh at the idea of me going on holidays to the middle of nowhere with a backpack and a map and just wandering off into the hills. But there's something really… freeing about being so alone, to just do whatever and go wherever you want to. I'd much rather be trekking across moorland or through forests than shuffling around some crowded plaza with a bunch of sweaty sunburnt tourists and a guide who clearly has better things to do than explain in what year some dusty old cathedral was built.

I've tried going walking with others, but it really isn't the same. I love my mum, but five minutes into a hike she starts asking where the nearest café is, or when the signal on her phone will kick back in. Honestly she's worse with that thing than I am, always talking to her mates on WhatsApp or regaling me with photos of her mates' grandkids. I'm not sure she's got the hint about the whole asexual thing, but I've learned to live with it. My dad's more patient, but even in retirement his schedule keeps him so busy we don't tend to get the time to go on proper long walks. And yes, he gets the irony of too busy for the most quintessential 'old person' activity imaginable.

I don't know why I'm telling you all this. I guess it serves as context? An excuse as to why I was up on Dartmoor alone? I'm always having to justify myself to people, I guess I just wanted to get in before the awkward questions started. And they always do start, every damn time, like clockwork. Not that I necessarily blame people for asking. They're just trying to understand it, after all. No one ever really gets how nice it is

to be alone. It's like, we live in such a… connected world, you know? All that social media at our fingertips, people only being a click away. It's just exhausting sometimes, having to be constantly available, always there to respond to texts or Facebook messages. Call me an old fogey if you want, but it's so good to be out in the middle of nowhere, with no signal and no way for anyone to disturb you. As long as I steer clear of the Princetown mast, phone reception is nigh on non-existent on Dartmoor, and Hound Tor is no exception.

I got my dad to drop me off at the carpark at the bottom of the hill and left him there, happy to sit with a book and an ice cream from the van for a bit before heading home. He and Mum live fairly locally, only over in Bovey Tracey, so it's not too much of a drive if I need to be picked up in an emergency. Far enough away, however, that there was still some feeling of freedom, like I was a teenager again revelling in being allowed to take the train alone a couple of stops down the line to the nearest city. I set off, turning back to wave at Dad at various intervals as he grew smaller and smaller behind me. The tor itself was usually a bit of a tourist trap, being one of the most well known, but I'd chosen to visit at about 8 in the morning on a Tuesday in term time, so it was almost deserted, and only got more so as I headed away from the tor and into the surrounding moorland.

It was early, obviously, and enough into autumn that the sun was only just beginning to reach over the horizon. I was high up enough that there were essentially clouds surrounding me, throwing a haze over my surroundings. I knew the area well enough that it didn't bother me too much, and honestly I just assumed the clouds would burn off as the day went on. It can get surprisingly warm up on the moors – I know a lot of people assume the worst, but nine times out of ten I'll set off in hat and gloves and finish my walk in just my t-shirt. The weather's so unpredictable up there that my rucksack is usually stuffed full of gear for

every possible scenario. I guess my brief stint in the Scouts really impressed on me the importance of ‘Be Prepared’. I know that day in particular I had packed both a waterproof coat and a pair of sunglasses, and the weather at the start of my walk was starting to make it look like the latter would be much more useful.

It was only after I’d been walking for about thirty minutes that I noticed the clouds getting thicker. I remember how odd I found it, because the air still felt just as warm as it had when the sun was shining, and yet the sky around me seemed to be covered in a thick layer of fog. Even when I started to feel colder, it was like the chill started deep within my bones, radiating out rather than settling on my skin as I would have expected.

My field of vision began to narrow, slow and almost imperceptibly, until I noticed that I could only about 10, maybe 15 feet ahead of me. This wasn’t unusual per se - fog on Dartmoor gets pretty intense pretty quickly and I’ve seen it get way worse before, but it was unsettling in a way I never usually felt. I don’t know what it was about that one morning, why I felt quite so uneasy walking along the path, past gorse bushes and bracken, but something didn’t feel quite... right.

I went to check the time on my watch, to see if I was making good time – I’d agreed to meet my parents in a pub for a late lunch and had meticulously planned out how fast I needed to be walking to get there on time, a holdover from my Ten Tors days. But when I looked at the face, it was almost as if the fog had somehow gotten... inside it. I’d had watches and compasses steam up before, condensation fogging over the inside of the glass and rendering them essentially useless, but this was different. This was a swirling grey mass inside the clock face, moving in a way that condensation never would. I guess that was my first real confirmation that something wasn’t right but, in that moment, all I could do was stare in disbelief.

I pulled out my phone at that point, dragging it up from the depths of my rucksack where it had been buried, and attempted to turn it on. It was usually my rule that, unless it was an absolute emergency, the phone stayed off during walks. Even for someone as adverse to technology as I was, it was still too much of a temptation having it on, like it was burning a hole in my bag unless I took it out just to check. If it weren't for the fact that I needed to contact my parents once I started getting near them, or my mum insisting I absolutely had to have a way to contact the authorities Just In Case, I wouldn't have brought it with me at all. This time however, I didn't have to worry about it being a distraction. Mostly because it stubbornly refused to turn on.

I tried plugging it into the portable charger I brought with me, but it didn't seem like the lack of battery was the problem. For a while I was worried it'd gotten damaged somehow, that the wet press of the fog had gotten inside and was currently messing up the electronics, but I always made sure I kept anything that precious or delicate in a dry bag, and it had even been wrapped upside my waterproof coat while I was walking, inside a waterproof bag for that matter. The longer I looked at it, the more I convinced myself there was the same swirling fog trapped within the dark screen that was obscuring the face of my watch. A frantic search through my bag confirmed the same was true for my compass, the needle completely lost in the haze.

The worst was the map. It was nigh on useless in the fog anyway, which at this point had trapped me in a bubble no more than five feet across. I'd never have been able to make out any landmarks, but at least I would vaguely know if there was any danger of me walking into a bog or falling down a ditch.

Even that small comfort was denied to me. The map I pulled out, which had only that morning been covered with the standard lines and squiggles that made up the Ordnance Survey map of Dartmoor, was completely and

utterly blank. I flipped it over and over, unfolding it completely and staring at every inch but I saw nothing but empty paper. It was like someone had taken a rubber to the thing, painstakingly erasing any hint of ink. All save for a small mark, left dead in the map's centre. A black 'x', labelled in equally tiny font "You Are Here".

At that point … I think I might have lost it a little bit. I remember sinking to my knees in absolute despair, shaking so hard the map fell out of my hands and onto the mossy floor beside me. I might have screamed, I don't know, but any sound I made came out… muffled somehow. It was like the fog was made of actual cotton, surrounding and smothering me, killing any chance I had of finding someone else in this godforsaken place. For the first time in my life, I was aching for company, desperate to be found, to be in the presence of somebody, anybody.

I stayed there shaking on the ground for what could have either been hours or seconds – time didn't seem to matter in such a swirling, all-encompassing abyss. All I know was my clothes were steadily getting sodden with mist, cooling until they matched the chill in my bones. Honestly, I think I'd probably still be there now, curled up on the path shaking, feeling such hopelessness and loneliness that it was paralysing me, if it hadn't been for the hounds.

It started off as a faint, far off noise, almost like the pattering of rain on something soft, like the roof of a tent. Even as quiet as it was, it was such a departure from the clinging silence that I snapped my head up, frantically seeking out the source. Like I said, I was desperate not only for company but just from any break from this awful, consistent monotony. What little colour I could still see, on the ground or on my own person, felt like it was being leeched from the world; everything was slowly becoming the same goddamn shade of pale, washed out grey.

I staggered to my feet, still shaking but filled now with something like hope. As the noise grew louder, it started to grow more recognisable. I'd run into my fair share of dog walkers out on the moors, and so the thudding of paws running across the damp earth was a familiar one and, in this case, one that I prayed indicated the presence of some kind of owner, someone I could ask for help.

Then the snarls began.

When I was younger, my parents used to watch Countryfile religiously every Sunday morning. I know, I know, don't judge, it's relevant. See, I remember when I was about eight or nine, there was a segment on hunting. I think the government was talking about issuing a ban, and the usual toffs were getting up in arms about the whole thing, absolutely horrified at the prospect of losing their chance to murder innocent animals. But the thing that stuck with me was this video they played, made by some anti-fox hunt group. It had been the first time I had seen dogs being so brutal, a far cry from our neighbours' sleepy Labrador or the enthusiastic collie who lived at my friend's farm. These were fox hounds, all snapping teeth and vicious eyes, no mercy – just cold animal fury. It gave me nightmares for years, and a lifelong fear of fox hounds that I used to get mercilessly teased for. Rottweilers and Dobermans I can handle, but get me near one of those hounds and all I can think about are those images of frothing mouths and snarling teeth

The sounds of those snarling hounds I heard that day were enough to set me off running.

That childhood terror came flooding back, all those buried memories of sleepless nights and dreams of snapping jaws. Within seconds I was in a dead sprint, my body almost moving without my needing to. Every part of me was overtaken with a new kind of fear. A different kind of terror, something more primal and dangerous. No longer was I feeling paralysed

by that cold loneliness. All I could focus on was the chase, the literal hounds at my heels.

The noises kept getting louder and louder, the ground beneath me shaking from the impact of their paws. I wasn't even on the path any more, instead dancing around patches of gorse and jumping over small rocks. I wasn't thinking about the danger, the risk of the uneven ground, or how absolutely and irrevocably lost I was getting. At some points it felt like almost all rational thought was driven from my mind, that if I'd tried to speak all that would come out would be whines.

My only thought was escape.

Even the sound of my heartbeat pounding in my ears still wasn't enough to drown out the noise of those hounds. I didn't dare turn back, too scared of being confronted by the images from my childhood. I couldn't face having to look those things in the eyes, to see the complete and utter feral fury that lay behind them. Judging from the sounds I was hearing, there were either far, far too many of them or they were huge, bigger than any fox hounds I'd ever seen. I kept thinking about all those local legends, the stories of people seeing huge black dogs on the moors round here. I'd laughed when I'd read them, joking about Grims and omens of death, but now it all felt terrifyingly real. Nothing I'd ever read had ever prepared me for this.

As I ran, the dogs seemed to gain on me, their pants and snarls getting closer and closer, louder and louder. I could feel their hot breath on my neck as they were almost on me, and the terror in me was close to boiling over. My legs were burning, feet stumbling over almost every obstacle in my path as I pushed myself to my limits. I knew I couldn't go for much longer like this, that eventually I would fall and be ripped apart, alone in the fog with no one to come and save me from these hounds.

Just as I had given up all hope, had completely resigned myself to my fate, two things happened.

I stumbled, my foot falling through a patch of elephant grass and my ankle twisting painfully as my leg collapsed underneath me. Yet even as I tumbled to the ground, bracing myself for the snap of jaws around my flesh, the second strange thing occurred. The sounds of the dogs… stopped, abruptly. It was like a switch had been flicked, as soon as I resigned myself to my fate. Once I stopped letting the fear overwhelm me, when I gave into it all, everything just…Well, even now I don't know how to explain it.

The fog cleared up instantly. Just completely vanished. It didn't even blow away in the wind or slowly dissipate, it *just* disappeared. I staggered to my feet, staring in astonishment and, honestly, the deepest relief I had even felt in my life. The sun was shining like nothing had ever happened, there was a light breeze rustling through the grass. It was a fairly standard October morning.

The strangest thing was, when I checked my map, not only had all the markings returned, but I didn't seem to have actually travelled any real distance at all. Judging by the landmarks I could make out around me, I was still fairly close to Hound Tor – almost exactly where I had been when the fog first started up. I know it sounds ridiculous, I must've been running for at least double the distance I'd covered since setting off, if not even further, but as far as I can tell I'd barely moved at all. A quick glance at my watch told me barely any time had passed either. In fact, as far as I could remember, my whole ordeal had taken no more than about five minutes.

I know how absolutely ridiculous this all sounds, and that I don't have a shred of evidence to back it up, but it was real. I just need someone to believe me. My parents knew something was up when I met them in the

pub at Manaton shaking like a leaf, pale as death, but when I tried to explain it, it all just sounded like the ravings of a mad woman. But I know what I saw. I've been having nightmares about it for the last few days. Every time I close my eyes, all I see is that swirling grey fog, hear the snapping of the hounds. I started looking around on forums, the kind of websites I'd have scoffed at before. That's how I found you lot, y'know. I don't think I've ever even been to this bit of London before, but as soon as someone said they'd contacted the Magnus Institute, I knew I had to come here. Apparently you people believe this kind of stuff. Either that or you're all just too polite to actively laugh in our faces.

But… Still. It means a lot. Being validated like that, knowing your paranoia isn't in vain. I've been terrified even to go back up there, ever since. I'd planned a few walks while I was down visiting my parents, but now I can't be anywhere where there isn't at least one other person. I've spent most of my days in coffee shops and libraries, anything to feel safe. Maybe it'll get better with time but… I don't think I'll ever be the same.

Statement ends.

Morgan is going to *kill* me for putting another Magnus Institute statement into our archives, but- *but* oh well. I think it's neat. Sorry, Mog.

That said–
[Shuffling.]

Ah- Lucy was right. We can't verify her experience in the least, but the recorder seems to be on her side. Nice going, Luce. Magnus got an interview with her father - Actually, I'm going to need to ask Adriene *why* we keep getting these statements; they're weirdly… Complete, I don't need to do anything except record them, anyway – Her father said that

he had taken her up to Hound Tor that morning, and met up with her in a pub in Manaton where she appeared at the time they had agreed on. He admitted she had seemed shaken, and also that the one she told him seems to match the one in the statement she gave to the institute.

End r–

Oh. Oh, one second, sorry, there's an extra note here in here. From someone with *terrible* handwriting, *o-kay*.

There's a home in the area owned by one Mr- *Patri*- no, Pete? *Peter*. One Mr Peter Lukas. That's.. A Magnus donor, I think, I– all I know is that *our* main donor, Callum –Something– Uh, Stewart! Callum Stewart– *He* absolutely hates Lukas, for.. Whatever reason. At any rate, the person with the godawful handwriting thinks that this is important, so I shall dutifully write it down and schedule a meeting with Callum. He's practically a hermit, it'll take me forever to get in with him.

Sorry to make this harder on you, Mog. I promise I will make it worse!

End recording.

[Theme plays.]

OUTRO

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[Theme ends.]